What is Space ?

Yajnavalkya - Gargi Dialogue (Debate)

In the modern times 'Space' is one of the fundamental questions in the modern physics and yet to be interrogated the nature of it. In the modern era, whenever the word 'space' comes in physics, we generally remember Einstein. But dear friends in India, this fundamental question of the nature of space was discussed at court of King Janaka in Mithila many thousands years ago before the birth of Einstein by the ancient Indian philosopher Yajnavalkya to the woman philosopher Gargi. The discussion is known as Yajnavalkya-Gargi Shastrarth (debate).

Yajnavalkya said, "What is your question? Ask!"

Gargi said, "Yajnavalkya, tell me what is that which is above heaven and below the earth, which is also between heaven and earth, and what was before, is now and will be in the future, and they are filled up with whom? "

Yajnavalkya replied, "It is said that the one who is above heaven also lives below the earth and also between them, And what was before, is in the present and will also be in the future and they are filled up with it, is Space. Space is the subtlest element, so subtle that it is often indistinguishable from Consciousness. Without it, nothing can exist. Yet he is something else."

Gargi said, "You have answered my first question. I bow down before you for respect. Now answer my second question"

Yajnavalkya said, "Oh! Gargi, Ask!"

Gargi said, " What is that space filled up with?"

Yajnavalkya replied, "The sages call him Akshar(Syllable) which is an invariable and imperishable object. He is neither gross, nor subtle, nor small, Kalpa, nor nature nor cold, nor light nor darkness, nor air nature nor nature. He is absolute, tasteless, and smell-less has no eyes, nor ear, nor speech, nor mind, nor energy, nor soul, nor mouth.

'Sun and Moon revolve according to their own fixed order on the order of that object, heaven and earth are situated in their respective places. Moments, day, night, light, month, seasons, and year follow their path. Rivers flowing in all directions, originating from the glaciers.

'O Gargi!, a person who is devoid of the knowledge of this substance in this world and performs austerities for a thousand years, will not get anything. His dedication and meditation are futile. The condition of a person who goes from this world without knowing this letter is pathetic. But after knowing this, one who leaves from here, this world, is knowledgeable. "O Gargi, this object is indistinguishable but the watcher is unashamed but the listener, indescribable but anxious, unknown is ignorance." There is no other, he is only a seer, no one else is the same listener, no other is anxious, only he is anxious, no other impermanence, only he is knowledgeable. O Gargi, in fact, Space (Aakash) is full of the same Akshar(Syllable). ''

Prepared By

Santosh Chaudhary

M.Sc (Physics)

Nalanda Open University

Patna